

2004 State of the City- February 5, 2004

Welcome Council President DerGurahian, City Council members, business owners, City employees, and most sincerely residents. Tonight I am charged with delivering my first State of the City address, a moment I have dreamed about since first being elected to the City Council just four years ago.

It is with tremendous excitement and anticipation that I stand before you tonight to proclaim that our great City is on a fast track to success. It is with great excitement and anticipation that I ask you to join me as we move Troy into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. And it is with great excitement and anticipation that I invite you to share in, and make real, our wonderful vision for this City.

We have so much potential in our City right now it is difficult for me to focus on one area. But I stand before you tonight to pledge that after years of planning in the City of Troy it is simply time to start doing! As businesses begin to pop up around the City and people understand what we have to offer, it is the responsibility of City government to oversee that growth and ensure nothing stands in its way.

With that in mind, I say to the people of Troy tonight that with the help of the City Council, I will do what is necessary to lead the City where it rightfully belongs- among the best cities in the United States.

That journey has already begun, and continues tonight with several priorities I want to see accomplished by the end of spring. We will rezone the South Troy Working Waterfront. Long the talk of exciting visions in the far off future, the new rezoning will work in a way to compliment existing business and promote new growth and development.

We will rezone the Hoosick Street Corridor to enable new commercial growth that will expand on tax base and provide needed services to our residents.

Previously there had been a plan in place to rezone the entire City at once through a Comprehensive Plan. This is a lengthy and important process, and in the interest of promoting business in Troy I have decided to ask the council to aggressively move forward with changes to the South Troy waterfront and Hoosick St Corridor before addressing the rest of the City. It is a plan I will present with only the interests of the City in mind.

While other projects like the South Troy Industrial road are entering the final design phase, there is good news for the Congress Street reconstruction project. That initiative has been talked about for years as well, but by this time next year we will have begun construction on the final phase of the stretch of road from Pawling Avenue to 11<sup>th</sup> Street.

Along that same route the City has an exciting opportunity near the Ferry Street intersection. It will take a tremendous amount of hard work, and compromises from the

City, Rensselaer County, the Troy Housing Authority and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. But hard work is not something we will ever shy away from, and this opportunity is no different. This is an area that is ripe for development with possibilities including new housing, mixed-use development, and retail, which will compliment existing downtown neighborhoods.

Further north, I recently had the opportunity to tour some of the renovated apartments in Kennedy Towers. When renovations are completed, the apartments will provide safe, modern, and affordable housing to the senior citizens in our community. For the people who taught all of us everything we know, that is the least we can provide.

The Kennedy Towers project highlights two areas of importance my administration wants to highlight. The first concentrates on what a public-private partnership can produce- a viable project the whole community can benefit from.

The second aspect highlights what can be done when the City partners with State officials to accomplish our goals. Governor George Pataki has visited Troy several times since I took office, and he will play a major role in our development.

Then there is Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno, whose ability to leverage dollars for the City of Troy has saved us from financial disaster. It is his continued leadership and ability in the State Senate that is helping Troy in so many of its projects.

And make no mistake, Troy is spearheading many initiatives, and the above examples only touch on a few. But for those initiatives to succeed, a well-developed infrastructure of education is essential. I put our educational partners of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Russell Sage College, and Hudson Valley Community College up there with any City in our state. Our elementary and high school level institutions are no different.

Just last month, I had an opportunity to watch students from Doyle Middle School, my alma mater, compete in the Future Cities Competition at RPI. The students built a futuristic model of the City 40 years from now. It was a City built on vision and hope, and one day those kids will be the future leaders of our City, State, and Country.

The presence of RPI in our City is something residents and businesses are very fortunate to have. As all of you know the school is in the midst of more than \$250 million in construction projects that will bring worldwide attention to Troy. We appreciate that investment and will certainly encourage them to spend another \$250 million if the school happens to be in the mood.

In the coming year we will partner with RPI in new and exciting ways. The school, led by Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson, is appreciated more and more by myself every day. That said, the City of Troy will seek the additional help of RPI as we venture further into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We will travel down many new avenues of discussion in search of finding a means to further our already strong relationship.

Our relationship with the university is stronger than ever, and so is the relationship between Troy and its investors. There are several people in our City willing to spend millions of dollars on hopes and dreams- Michael Cocca, David Bryce, John Hedley, and Sandy Horowitz to name a few. Michael, David, John, and Sandy have visions I hope will succeed. They have visions I know will succeed.

The investment from the above people will go a long way in making our downtown the place we all know it can be. But so do the smaller investments from people like Michael Fallone and Doug Bartow who opened up a marketing and design business on First Street just this afternoon. I went to the opening of ID29 and told the two gentlemen that it was people like them that would shape the future of the City. When I say that to people like Michael and Doug, or Arthur and Annette Simard from Arnet's on Broadway, or to Sarah Baisley at Iris, or my wife Francesca, I mean it.

One important road to the realization of a great downtown will come through the help of the Business Improvement District, which will come before downtown property owners for a vote in the near future. It is a prospect that I was hesitant to support in the beginning. However, after careful review, I have wholeheartedly embraced the cause and throw my full support behind the BID tonight.

Word of all the positive action occurring in the Collar City is spreading fast. We have a housing stock in Troy that is selling at an extremely fast pace. Houses are going on the market and selling weeks, and sometimes just days, later. It is with that exciting news that tonight I announce two more initiatives I will ask the council to support in the coming months.

The first is the Filling-In Program, which has been implemented in cities like Columbus, Ohio. This program will enhance our City landscape, improve neighborhoods, and increase our future tax base by allowing responsible property owners in Troy the opportunity to purchase vacant lots and build residences in return for the City forgiving new property taxes for five years.

It is with an eye towards the future that I ask the Council and residents of Troy to have faith in this program. Investment is the key to the future. If a person is willing to shell out money from their pockets to build a home on vacant land, we need to look at the big picture.

Vacant lots and rundown houses plague some areas in the City. We need to encourage people to invest into those areas, to stabilize our neighborhoods. I know there will be skepticism, but it is with the future of Troy in mind that I propose this program.

A second initiative I will ask the council to work with me on is the Reinvest in Troy Program. Far too often I have heard people on the street say that they believe in our City, love Troy as much as the next guy, but are afraid to make improvements to their homes out of fear of having their property assessment raised.

This program will allow any assessment increase to be worked in over a period of time to help offset any immediate hike. We need to offer people incentives to invest here, not disincentives. If you want to invest in this City, you are a friend of ours, and we will treat you like one.

It is the residents of Troy- past, present and future- that are the most important people in this puzzle of ours. It is with their hard earned money that this City runs, and it is with their hard earned money that it will shine. To those residents I pledge- I will do all that is in my power to deliver the services you expect and deserve.

One of the ways we will deliver new and exciting benefits to you is through the City website. We have made several changes in the Information Services department, which now employs a talented group of people, hungry to see Troy succeed. This department will work closely with my staff and neighborhood leaders to ensure that anyone looking for information about Troy will be able to do so online. From neighborhood summations to a calendar of events to updated mayoral messages, under my administration the website will become a tool people utilize, not an outdated bulletin board.

In just five weeks in office I have begun to outline a plan that will clean up this City so that we may move past the perception that Troy is not clean and safe. In these first five weeks we have formulated parts of our plan. It is called the Troy Action Team and you are our bosses. We are but members of that team, and I am grateful to have teammates willing to work hard to do what is right for Troy.

We have firefighters who work in below zero temperatures fighting three-alarm blazes that nearly destroyed an entire City block. I watched proudly as those men did all they could to save the buildings that were burning, all the while ignoring the fact that they had ice hanging from their faces. This is a job they enjoy and do every single day. They deserve our recognition.

We have police officers that work tirelessly to investigate, find and arrest those bringing down our City. The arrest of Lance Booker last week brought a piece of closure to the family of Christopher Drabik, and helped ensure the safety of those who were left scared by a senseless act of violence last December. Instead of taking a bow however, the officers charged with keeping Troy safe, have moved on to other cases in hopes of bringing closure to others. They deserve our recognition.

We have CSEA employees, those who pick up garbage every day, cleanup the streets, plow the snow, inspect the buildings, repair water main breaks at 3 a.m., plan for the future, and handle all finances. These are behind the scenes heroes. They make my job look easy, and do so in a silent, professional way. In particular, the DPW employees, under the watch of Commissioner Bob Mirch, have stood with us during the first five weeks. They deserve our recognition.

With all the pieces in place, Troy just needs some action to assemble everything. That is what the Action Team is for. So far, we have cleaned up alleys in Lansingburgh,

including one with nine tons of trash, and billed them more than \$2,200 for the cleanup. We have shut down eyesores in North Central, one that was a haven for drug dealers and illegal late night activity. We have forced businesses in South Troy to comply with City Code after years of not doing so.

Our neighborhoods are what we will tolerate. Outside influences that offer nothing positive to our neighborhoods will no longer be tolerated. These people will cleanup their acts or they will be forced to leave. I don't care where they go, but they cannot stay here!

Earlier this week a newspaper commented that the actions of my administration thus far, "may be scoffed at by some who believe a mayor has bigger fish to fry, but Tutunjian is trying to wrap his arms around chronic problems that have plagued the City for years." That made me smile. It is my personal belief that the major role I play for this City is to be its biggest cheerleader. By doing that, the fish will fry a little easier. I will stand by our talented employees in good times and bad. Together we will succeed as a team.

And while I cannot stress the positive aspects of our City strongly enough, I also bring to you tonight a cautionary message. In the coming year we will face many challenges. Foremost among those challenges is our fiscal stability.

In 2005, contractual salaries will grow more than \$700,000. Our health care and benefits will grow more than \$950,000. If the status quo remains, our retirement costs will exceed more than \$6.4 million. The 2003 final retirement cost was slightly more than \$1.9 million, which means we are looking at an increase of more than 330 percent.

Because of those fiscal conditions we are tightening our belts early in the year. My administration fully understands the condition we are in, and we have begun to make some of the necessary changes to provide the maximum amount of day-to-day services while cutting excess costs.

To date we have cut several administrative positions out of the 2004 budget. They are positions that will not return and have been deemed unnecessary by my administration. The total cost savings in the administrative department thus far totals more than \$140,000 in salary and health benefits. That equates to nearly a one percent tax increase.

It is with that fiscal integrity in mind that I tell the people of Troy tonight I will work as hard as I can with the Council to keep the fiscal conditions respectable and minimize any potential tax increase.

To further our cost savings I am pleased to announce tonight that I will not hire a full-time Corporation Counsel. Thanks to the current talented staff we have in place, the City is well equipped to handle all legal matters at this time. Based on budget estimates we will save an additional \$59,000 in permanent salaries in the Corporation Counsel's office in 2004.

Another minor step the City has made is signing an agreement with Rensselaer County to employ residents currently receiving welfare assistance to work hours in the Department of Public Works at no added cost to taxpayers. This arrangement offers us workers at no charge, while providing valuable work experience to those on public assistance.

The City Council should also be commended as well for lowering the water rate earlier this year and cutting an unneeded position out of the Department of Public Utilities.

We will continue to search for new revenues as well. In the coming months, I will introduce a task force that will search for ways to sell one of our greatest resources-water- to additional neighboring communities.

But as we search for new revenues an emphasis is also being placed on those who owe us money. They will not be given a free pass, we will not look the other way, and we will be vigilant in collecting outstanding debt. In short, there are no more deals!

In the next few weeks we will finalize a settlement concerning property assessment for the Tomhannock Reservoir. This battle has been waging for years and will bring us a financial gain of more than \$1.5 million, and a savings of hundreds of thousands dollars in future years.

We are currently in negotiations with the City of Rensselaer for the services of our water. The City gladly extends the invitation to continue our relationship, but will do so remembering that Rensselaer happens to owe us more than one million dollars in past water bills. For the past five years they have not been made to pay that bill. Now, it is money we expect to collect. It is money I know we will collect.

And on a smaller scale the City has begun the elementary practice of booting cars-something that should have been done long ago. Troy is owed more than \$200,000 by drivers who have three or more outstanding parking tickets. That is an outrageous number, and we have started the process to fix that.

The key aspect of all fiscal integrity however, is accountability. Accountability in Troy is something that will no longer be a concept in City Hall, but a practice! Tonight I am pleased to announce the first stage of a reorganization of City government.

The Police Department and Fire Department, under the very capable leadership of Police Chief Nick Kaiser and Fire Chief Tom Garrett, will report directly to me, as will the Corporation Counsel office.

The remaining departments in the City will be managed by three people I am pleased to introduce tonight as leaders of the administrative team.

As of today, Deputy Mayor Jim Walsh will manage all infrastructure in the City departments of Public Utilities, Engineering, and Planning, as well as any economic and business development. These departments will play a major role in the future of all City

projects and currently have a watchful eye over them. Mr. Walsh will ensure that the best interests of the City are represented in these departments.

Deputy Mayor of Constituent Relations Dan Crawley will take charge of the Department of Public Works, Code Enforcement, Solid Waste Management, and Information Services. In short, Mr. Crawley will report to both myself and the people of Troy. As the coordinator of Troy's Action Team, Mr. Crawley has spent the first month of my term hitting the streets and letting people know that we mean business. If our City is to succeed, we must have clean and safe streets, an ability to keep pace technologically, and the leadership skills to handle every day matters.

The final member of my team is Comptroller Deborah Witkowski, who has taken on a serious amount of responsibility during my first month in office and has proven to be a most welcome addition to our team. Ms. Witkowski will be in charge of all financial operations in the City including her office, Payroll, Treasury, Vital Statistics, and Human Resources.

I have confidence in the abilities of the team in place. I have confidence in the City employees. I have confidence in residents, business owners, and students in Troy. Together, working as one team, we have the ability to prove to the entire area, the entire state, and the entire country that we are an extremely strong community, one that will not be deterred by bumps in the road. We are a team that will work as hard as we can to make Troy, New York, the best place it can be. I look forward to working with all of you during this long and exciting journey. Thank you and good night.